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**China: Implications of Joint-Service Exercise**

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*Comments and queries regarding this publication, which replaces the China Review and the East Asia Review of the former Office of Political Analysis, may be directed to the Chief of Production, Office of East Asian Analysis, telephone*

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# China: Implications of Joint-Service Exercise

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The PLA has completed the largest exercise it has ever conducted to counter a simulated Soviet attack. The exercise and attendant publicity were designed to show audiences at home and abroad that China's military capability had not been degraded by budget cuts or political controversies. Also implicit was the theme that technological backwardness within the PLA would be offset for the time being by a massive, highly disciplined ground force. The official Chinese media used the exercise to emphasize the leadership of Deng Xiaoping over the military, to demonstrate unity among Politburo leaders, to attempt to lift the Army's morale, and to promote measures to "regularize" the PLA.

Ministry of National Defense spokesmen asserted that the exercise was intended in part to raise the Army's morale, which had fallen because of budget reductions, high-level criticism of cadre malfeasance, extensive demobilizations, and hints of additional measures to ferret out undesirables. The broad publicity given the maneuver coincided with the fall conscription campaign and almost certainly served to elevate the PLA in the public eye and among prospective inductees.

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Media coverage of the exercises stressed the ability of the PLA to wage modern warfare despite recent budgetary constraints. A *Liberation Army Daily* editorial of 27 September highlighted the complexity of the maneuvers and the professionalism of the units involved. The exercises and the subsequent press exposition helped answer critics, in and out of the PLA, who argue that "people's war" concepts—the cornerstone of Chinese Communist military practice since the 1930s—are inappropriate for fighting a modern adversary. The editorial, implicitly recalling an intra-army debate in the 1950s over the relative benefits of military professionalism and reduced emphasis on political education, praised the efforts during those years to "regularize" the PLA. Present efforts presumably include long-rumored and currently pending reforms to reintroduce ranks, enforce "up or out" retirements, and further emphasize military professionalism—all of which were abandoned during the stewardship of Lin Biao.

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Deng Xiaoping's prominence in military affairs was apparent throughout the postexercise publicity as Chinese media featured him dressed in military attire watching the exercises, reviewing the troops, and chatting among the ranks. The front page of the 27 September *People's Daily* ran two large photographs. The more prominent one featured Deng in conversation with party Chairman Hu Yaobang, whom Deng may be grooming to chair the party's Military Commission. In a conspicuous attempt to convey a sense of unity among the top leaders, the other photo showed Deng, Hu, Premier Zhao Ziyang, and other party leaders, including deposed party Chairman Hua Guofeng, on the reviewing stand. [REDACTED]

The central party leadership recognizes that Hua still enjoys some support within the PLA for championing the legacy of Mao Zedong against rapid implementation of reforms intended to dilute Mao's relevance in all spheres of Chinese life. Hua's inclusion in the media coverage probably was intended to assuage the feeling among the ranks that he was treated roughly by Deng and company at the recent Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee. [REDACTED]

The media's treatment of Deng and the exercises strongly associated progress in combat readiness with Deng's leadership. Additional measures that Deng seeks to implement within the Army went unmentioned amid the laudatory propaganda but nevertheless are prominent on the agenda. Thus, on the one hand, Hu Yaobang recently praised the PLA's turnaround in political attitude and military bearing as a model for state and party cadre to emulate, directly attributing these developments to Deng's leadership. On the other hand, Chief of Staff Yang Dezhi, in an October speech to administrative officers at and above the division level, made a pointed reference to veteran cadre who should "comply with the arrangements made for them by the party"—meaning, to retire and make room for qualified successors. [REDACTED]

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